

No. 52. On the Loss of the Soul.

Matthew 16th, 26th Verse. "

What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

It pleased the All-wise Creator, after man had lost his innocency, that his bread should be earned by labor, and his subsistence acquired by solicitude. It was ordered likewise by All-seeing wisdom, that disappointment should frequently accompany his toil and frustrate his intentions; that uncertainty in the possession, and insecurity in the enjoyment should always await, with forbidding aspect and discouraging intimations, not only the practice of fraud but the dealings of integrity; teaching us hereby that we should not be too anxiously careful about many things in this life; but that we should have a principal regard to "the one thing needful," and exert every effort to secure "that good part which shall not be taken away from us."

But uncertainty and disappointment are not our only discouragements: be our success what it may, it is limited to a very short period:—"the dust of which we are made returns to dust, and the spirit to God who gave it." The soul has originally impressed upon it the idea that it is accountable to a Supreme Being for what it does in the body, and has received—we at least have received—a clear and an express declaration from God, that it shall be rewarded or punished together with the body, for what is done in this life, either with eternal felicity, or everlasting destruction.

We will consider what the soul of man is; its immense value; and its dreadful loss; and then what a man will be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.

(1) The soul of man is that spiritual and invisible part created by God, and is capable of existing when separate from the body. "God made man of the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils

"the breath of life, and he became a living soul." The soul then is immaterial. It was not made of matter—of the dust of the earth, as the body was—but by the breath of God. It has an immediate divine original, and a near resemblance to the purity and spirituality of the Divine Essence.

So that our souls, deriving their originality from the Divinity itself, are of an unperishable nature. Death is only a translation of the soul from its earthly tabernacle, a passage through the vale of mortality to the land of duration.

(2) When the whole human race, through the transgression of our first parents, lay under the sentence of condemnation, it pleased the Almighty to restore us to His favor by assuming, in the person of Jesus Christ, the human nature. It appeared to Almighty wisdom, that the only expedient of saving man was, to become man himself, to suffer, and to die for lost mankind. "For us men, and for our salvation, God humbled himself and became

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"obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

(3) If then we could not be restored to the favor of God without this mighty effort of Omnipotence, our own reason—even if the Scriptures were silent, would suggest to us, that, unless our condition had been deplorable, God would not have put himself to such an expence of mercy. He wrought this stupendous miracle, He submitted to this wonderful abasement to deliver us from eternal death, to rescue us from the power of Satan, and the torments of Hell. And such is the wisdom of God, that, if we do not entitle ourselves to a state of happiness, "there remains only a fearful looking for of judgment"—if we do not secure the felicity of heaven, we cannot escape the miseries of Hell. Though we may be so infatuated with folly, so blinded by iniquity, as to reject God's offer of mercy, yet we are not able to annihilate our souls: we may deprive them of immortal life, but then we plunge them into eternal misery: they cannot cease to be, but they will become mis-

zable—which is infinitely worse than not to be at all.

(4) Let us now consider what a man will be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.

Whatever be the object of our wishes, much time, and thought, and labor, are generally requisite before we can attain it. If we covet wealth, we must rise early, late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness; our days will be consumed in toil, our nights passed in solicitude, our minds harraased with cares, our consciences distracted often with the reflection, that, to procure it, we have imposed on the ignorant, trampled on the weak, defrauded the unwary. All this anxiety is suffered, and guilt incurred, and we have the mortification, not infrequently, to fail in our attempts; and all we obtain are an untimely grave, a reproachful memory, and an early damnation.

But allowing that we are not disappointed in our efforts—that every thing we do succeeds abundantly beyond our expectations—and that, in a very little

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time, we are in possession of whatever our most sanguine wishes could desire—still we are uncertain how long we shall be permitted to possess it: and when we draw near our end and cast up our accounts, we find nothing remaining but the piercing reflection “of wrong and robbery,” and the dreadful expectation of God’s eternal displeasure. Thus is trouble undergone, our innocence forfeited, God’s vengeance brought upon us, through the expectation of gaining—not the whole world—not the principal, nay scarce the most inconsiderable part—nothing more than what we call a competency—what will place us above want, or secure us in independence—and the very object for which we are so earnestly striving is attended with disappointment sometimes in the pursuit, with anxiety often in the possession, with uncertainty always in the enjoyment. What will it profit us if we gain what we so earnestly desire, but by such means that we lose our souls? Or, if we are so earnest to gain it, that we neglect to discharge the duties of a Christian, and by

preferring the goods of this world to the salvation of the next, leave ourselves no hopes in the Divine Mercy—what will it profit us?

If we could grasp whatever both of wealth, honor, and power, our imaginations can conceive, as we could enjoy them only during the term of our lives—and as we could not extend the term a moment beyond its appointed limits—as we could not be secure from the attacks of sickness, nor the violence of pain, from the pangs of sorrow nor the wounds of disappointment—even this state, however enviable, loses much of its value. To which we may add, that, if, in the acquisition of wealth—the prosecution of honor, the attainment of power, the laws of God or man be violated, we forfeit our immortal happiness. For a small share of the glories of this world, we make a bargain with the Devil to resign all pretensions to those of the next; the very worst bargain that ever entered into the heart of man to make. Thus for a moment of time, we make an exchange for an eternity of duration. We

content ourselves with the chance of fugitive pleasures, for which we sacrifice the blessings of immortality. We pursue the object of our wishes under the consciousness that we are offending God, and "treasuring up" for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath. All our time, thoughts, and affections are devoted to the attainment of our wishes. And whether we shall lose our souls by their attainment, as it does not employ our consideration, so it does not interrupt our pursuits. But what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Let us suppose that we are not, in the end, disappointed—that fortune smiles propitious on our labors—and that we arrive at what we esteem the summit of happiness. Now if this which constitutes our happiness be acquired by means repugnant to human, and condemned by Divine laws, we know that, after our departure out of this life, which must be soon, we are to be judged by a Being, who "is of purer eyes" than to behold iniquity; that, as we have transgressed His laws which He has given us as the rule

of our conduct, and has most pathetically urged us to a frequent perusal of them, the wealth we have acquired, the honor we have obtained, the power we have possessed, instead of being our defence, "will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us." But what are acquisitions when they are incompatible with God's commandments? When by the manner in which we have obtained them, we provoke His displeasure? When against oppression, deceit, injustice, profaneness, the sentence, which "will make both the ears of those that hear it to tingle," will be denounced, "go ye, cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels?" When such a punishment awaits those who for this world's goods provoke God's wrath against them, shall we not despise all the profits, the honors, the pleasures of the world, nay the whole world itself?

What we would give in exchange for our souls, may be best understood by considering of what value we should esteem riches and pleasures, if we knew that, after we had enjoyed them for a given time, as a day, a week,

or a month, we must resign them and our life together. Ask the man who is in excruciating torture, if, to receive riches and honors during the remaining part of his life, he would be content to have his torture lengthened for a year, nay for half the period? As the Apostle "esteemed all things but dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord"—so to obtain ease and relief, he would willingly sacrifice all that this world can give. What folly, what madness is it then, either by laying up treasures unjustly acquired—or, if they are not gotten by injustice, yet so alienate our minds from God, that we live in the continual neglect of our christian duty—what folly, what madness is it to endanger our souls—to leave ourselves without hopes in His mercy—to deprive ourselves of every other expectation than to "dwell for ever," as the Prophet awfully expresses it, "in the devouring fire—than to dwell for ever in everlasting burnings?"

I will detain you a little longer, whilst

I make an application from what has been said.

To make no provision against hereafter—to live totally regardless of what will become of our souls—is so generally prevalent, one might almost suppose we are convinced that it is not possible our souls can be lost. What an insult is such conduct to the wisdom of God? We undervalue a soul which, He who created, and who would not willingly have it lost, accounted a fit purchase to be made by the passion and death of the eternal Son of God. And yet we know that, after the separation of soul and body, there remains no more death but this second death, whose duration is eternal. Before we are subject to his empire—let us make an estimate of what we may gain or lose—let us cast up the minutes, and years, and ages of eternity—let us consider what it is to live “in the blackness of darkness”—to be tormented in the fire that never goes out, during the long, long period of for ever and ever! To be stript of all we esteem happiness here—to find nothing that can make us happy but what we have

obstinately refused—what we have no right to, and what we must never have—to see such loss, and to think on it for ever, without any thing to amuse or engage our thoughts—and to be suffering, without the smallest interval, the most exquisite punishment; I cannot find words strong enough to impress the awful thought upon your hearts. Did the Almighty speak to us in a language He has sometimes addressed to his servants, “set thine house in order, for thou shalt “die and not live”—with what consternation should we receive the message? Death and Judgment, a provoked Judge and a miserable Eternity would then be, not as they often are, subjects of sport, but of terror. The little time we had remaining would be spent in fervent Prayer, in deprecating the vengeance, and supplicating the mercy of God. Let us bring the awful subject still nearer; let us suppose that we who are here assembled are the only people upon earth—that this temple is the seat of Judgment—that this day, I tremble whilst I make the supposition! is the tremendous day,

"in which God will judge the world in righteousness," that this is the last hour of our lives, and the consummation of all things—that the heavens are opening over our heads, and that Jesus Christ is appearing in all His majesty with Angels and Archangels—that the last trumpet is now giving the alarming summons—and that we are attending to receive either the sentence of approbation, or the doom of judgment:—on what side should we each of us be placed? on the right hand, or on the left? amongst the sheep, or the goats? How many of us would be called to join the choir of Heaven? How many condemned to weeping and wailing in Hell? How many would cry "come Lord Jesus, come quickly?" How many more, I fear, would "call on the mountains to fall on them, and the hills to cover them?" Represent frequently to yourselves this awful, this interesting scene, and you will feel the force of our Saviour's question—what shall it profit, &c.

' Lord of Heaven and Earth, impress on our

' imaginations the awful scene, at which we are not
 ' to be unconcerned spectators—the awful scene, when
 ' the earth shall melt away—when the Heavens shall
 ' be wrapped up like a scroll—when Jesus Christ
 ' shall receive to immortal happiness, those who have
 ' been solicitous about their salvation, and shall con-
 ' demn those who would not be saved from the presence
 ' of the Lord; Oh! then gracious God, may we be
 ' caught up in the air, and be for ever with the Lord!

Theoph^s. J. St. John.

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

The Author, having now published all the
Discourses he intends at present, 52, desires respect-
fully to return his thanks to those Clergymen who
have so liberally encouraged him to proceed in the pub-
lication. He was still more encouraged by hear-
ing that, in many parishes, where his M.S.S. have
been already preached, the congregations and commu-
nicants are rapidly increasing. His sermons
are not moral essays or philosophical disquisitions,
because he attributes to such perverted preaching the
total ignorance of Christianity, the lukewarmness
of principle, and degeneracy of conduct, by which so
very many, who profess themselves members of our
church, are unhappily distinguished. He is fully
persuaded that every conscientious Clergyman who
may do him the honor to use them, when he is to
give an account of his preaching, will find himself to
have been, in the hands of Providence, the blessed in-
strument "of converting many from the error of their
ways."

London, June 1st, 1790.

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Extract of a Letter from a Dignitary to his Nephew.

On my return to ——— I found my Congregation and Communicants prodigiously increased, my Curate had used Mr. St. John's M.S. Sermons, with which my Parishioners are much pleased, and, I hope, improved. They are wrote upon the Plan recommended by Dr. Blair in his Lectures; the conclusions are in general so very pathetic and persuasive, that they scarce can fail of producing a good effect.

